

When grammar meets politics: Uses of stigmatized language on a political talk show

1. Introduction

In this paper, we investigate speakers' uses of stigmatized grammar during high-stakes interactions on a political talk show in order to better comprehend the nature of the emergence of linguistic forms and their distribution in stylized political discourse. In doing so, we offer an emergentist, sociocultural approach to morpho-syntactic variation (e.g. Van Compernelle 2011, Eckert 2008, Hopper 1987) and show that interactional linguistic data provide quantitative sociolinguists many rich angles through which to observe the patterning of linguistic variables above and beyond the traditional sociolinguistic interview (e.g. Labov 1984; Tagliamonte, 2006: Ch. 3). A careful analysis of our data makes one thing very clear; grammar is political. To understand the variation of linguistic forms is to understand the emergence and distribution of power among speakers. Because structures, both social and linguistic, are emergent in interaction (Bucholtz & Hall 2005; Bybee & Hopper 2001; Tedlock & Mannheim 1995) we show why it is here that we must look in order to better understand how language both reflects and refracts society in speakers' "ongoing and lifelong projects of self-construction and differentiation" (Eckert 2012: 453).

For the sociolinguist interested in the social meaning of variation, former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez Frías' weekly political talk show *Aló Presidente* provides an encapsulating venue through which to observe how speakers perform multiple personae as they access the indexical fields (Eckert, 2008) of linguistic variables across multiple communicative events. Within the Spanish-speaking world, perhaps no other political leader of the past twenty

years has conjured such strong emotions as Chávez. Known best for his charismatic yet confrontational speeches, the late Venezuelan president quickly rose through the ranks of the Venezuelan army to later become a politics lecturer and, in 1999, president of his country. As others have pointed out (i.e. Rosa Gualda, 2012; Smith, 2010), *Aló Presidente* was the central platform from which Chávez's advocated for the policies of his administration both to the citizens of his country and the world. The program combined hours of personal monologue by Chavez, conversations with numerous guests, exchanges with broadcast assistants, and calls from supporters around the country. In every episode, Chávez can be observed making use of multiple phonological, phonetic, and morpho-syntactic stylistic variables. Here, we focus on understanding the patterning of one of these: variable agreement with the existential verb *haber*. We examine how this variable is used both by Chavez and the guests on this show across speech events spanning numerous interactional contexts.

2. Variable agreement with Spanish *haber*

In Spanish, the existential verb *haber* displays variable patterns of agreement in nearly all varieties of oral Spanish (DeMello, 1991), though it is reported to be especially prevalent in the Spanish of Venezuela (i.e. Freitas Barros, 2008; D'Aquino Ruiz, 2008). Among morpho-syntactic variables, few have been investigated from such a wide array of viewpoints and perspectives as the variable agreement of plural subjects with existential-presentational verbs (i.e. Crawford, 2005; Fontanella de Weinberg, 1992; Feagin, 1979; Kany, 1951). In prescriptive Spanish grammars (e.g. Alarcos Llorach, 1994; Gili-Gaya, 1964), the nominal argument in the *haber* clause is said to function as a direct object and thus does not concord in number with the tense/aspect/mood (TAM) conjugation of the verb.

- (1) *Había_{SG} dos personas*, 'There was two people'

**Habían_{PL} dos personas*, ‘There were two people’

In this way, the lexical noun phrase can be substituted with a direct object pronoun (2a) or, conversely, be represented within the conjugation itself (2b). It cannot, however, appear as a subject pronoun (2c).

- (2) a. *Había dos personas_{DO} > Los_{DO} había*
 b. *Había/n dos personas > Ø Había/n*
 c. *Habían dos personas_{SUJ} > *Ellas_{SUJ} habían*

Such patterns contrast with prescriptive accounts of the English “there + BE” constructions, which hold that the nominal argument following the verb is a subject and must concord in number the verb’s conjugation. In turn, the dummy expletive ‘there’ appears in the grammatical subject position while the verb’s agreement with the notional subject in number, though prescriptive, displays variation (i.e. there’s vs. there are three people).

Of all Spanish dialects, the pluralization of *haber* has been the most widely studied in Venezuelan Spanish (i.e. Obediente, 1984; Alario, 1992; Domínguez et al., 1998). Data taken from sociolinguistic interviews from the 1970s and 1980s show that speakers personalize this verb around 50% of the time in its variable context, defined as those instances where *haber* appears with a plural referent and agreement can be observed through observing the concordance in number between the argument and the verb (D’Aquino Ruiz, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 2003). Pluralization has been shown to be most frequent in imperfect indicative constructions (*había/n* ‘there was/were’) and, secondarily, with other simple forms such as the present subjunctive (*haya/n* ‘there is/are’) and/or with compound forms like the present perfect (*ha/n habido* ‘there has/have been’). Conversely, pluralized variants of the present indicative (*hay/n* ‘there is/are’) and preterit (*hub-o/-ieron* ‘there was/were’) are rare in Venezuelan Spanish, as is the case with most other varieties of Spanish (DeMello, 1991). These forms are widely reported as being

stigmatized (Montes Giraldo, 1982) and may be resistant to pluralization given language specific structural factors (García, 1986). Such postulations are indeed reminiscent of findings originating from language attitude surveys in Venezuela that have found that while speakers deem many pluralized variants as incorrect, the variant '*hubieron*' is more negatively evaluated than others. In perceptual studies, listeners overwhelmingly associate '*hubieron*' with people of low economic and educational achievement (Freites Barros, 2004). These lower and working class citizens are the same people who were most likely to support Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution.

More recent studies of *haber* pluralization have highlighted that finding that rates of agreement have increased overtime in various corpora of oral speech from Venezuela. Freites Barros (2008), for example, reports a pluralization rate of 82% for data collected within the past decade while D'Aquino Ruiz (2008) reports an increase in pluralization rates from 36% to 66% between 1973 and 1987 using data taken from sociolinguistic interviews. Scholars have also pointed to a number of linguistic variables that they find to be variably correlated with pluralized variants in Venezuelan Spanish. These include animate referents in the *haber* construction (Bentivoglio & Sedano, 1989; Díaz-Campos, 1999-2000; Freites Barros, 2008), the absence of negation in the *haber* clause (D'Aquino Ruiz 2004), determiner use with the nominal argument, (Freites Barros, 2008), lower educational achievement (D'Aquino Ruiz 2004), the position of the noun phrase in relation to the verb (Freites Barros, 2008), and non composed TAM conjugations (D'Aquino-Ruiz, 2004). Similar to non-standard agreement patterns among English speakers (i.e. Riordan, 2007; Meechan & Foley, 1994), plural forms of *haber* are used more by female Venezuelan speakers, younger generations, and speakers from lower socioeconomic statuses overall (Díaz-Campos, 1999-2000, 2003; D'Aquino Ruiz, 2004).

While these macro-demographic social variables provide a rudimentary understanding of

how pluralized variants pattern in Venezuelan society at large, they provide little insight into how speakers use them during and across situated speech events. To our knowledge, this study is a first in quantitatively examining the relationship between multiple interactional predictors and the patterning of a morpho-syntactic variable. Given the asserted importance of interactional contexts in the construction of social and linguistic structures and the deployment of stylized speech (Eckert, 2008), we hypothesize that variables associated with the interactions that take place on *Aló Presidente* will be better at predicting when speakers use pluralized variants than what macro socio-demographic categories can predict alone. Thus, we hypothesize not only that sequences displaying greater degrees of interaction will display higher rates of agreement but also that the number and type of one's interlocutors will show an effect on speakers' rates of deployment of pluralized forms of *haber*. This we predict to be true both in a model of all of the speakers on *Aló Presidente* and specifically for Hugo Chávez himself, who is naturally represented by over half of the tokens in the data set that we describe and analyze below. Moreover, we hypothesize that the interactional variables that we outline here will be better predictors of agreement with *haber* than the linguistic factors that have been so widely cited in previous variationist literature on this topic.

In the sections that follow, we describe the data that were collected and analyzed for our study and define the methods that we have used in performing their quantitative analysis. We follow this with an analysis of our results and their discussion.

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Corpus

The 500 tokens of *haber* that were analyzed for this study originate from the transcripts of 79 episodes of *Aló Presidente* that are available online through the website for the Venezuelan

Ministry for Popular Power in Communication and Information (<http://www.alopresidente.gob.ve/>). In order to avoid a potential bias, we used a randomizer to select the episodes from which these observations originate. We also systematically checked each transcript to ensure accurate orthographic representations of the variable forms that comprise the dependent variable of this study and each coded token was crosschecked in order to ensure that coding criteria were accurately maintained. All together, this corpus represents nearly 20% of the episodes of *Aló Presidente* and hundreds of hours of speech. Our corpus includes only tokens of spontaneous speech appearing on the show. The 500 tokens represent 72 speakers of varying ages, occupations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

3.2 Envelope of Variation

As with all previous quantitative studies of *haber* pluralization (i.e. Rivas & Brown, 2012; D'Aquino Ruiz, 2008), we define the envelope of variation as being all presentational/existential uses of the verb *haber* in which the lexical argument is a plural referent. This allows us to be able to observe tvariable patterns of agreement because the number of the referent is represented in the TAM conjugation (something that is not possible for singular referents). Furthermore, we limit our analysis to only those TAM combinations that display variable agreement with plural referents, since pluralized forms such as *hayn* (present indicative) have not previously been reported in Venezuelan Spanish. We determined which TAM combinations to ultimately include by checking all available transcripts of *Aló Presidente* (~378). Thus, while we observed thousands of tokens of *haber*, only the following TAM constructions are represented within our corpus: the imperfect indicative (*había/habían*), the preterit perfect indicative (*hubo/hubieron*), the imperfect subjunctive with -ra (*hubiera/hubieran*), the synthetic future (*habrá/habrán*), the periphrastic future (*va a haber/van*

a haber), and modal verbs with *haber* as an infinitive (*debe/deben haber*, *tiene/tienen que haber*) or gerund (*sigue/siguen habiendo*). All other TAM combinations and possibilities were excluded.

3.3 Variables

A primary goal of this study is to demonstrate the importance of interactional factors in predicting variable agreement patterns in *haber* constructions. To show this effect with a statistical model, we also include a number of other linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that have previously been considered for analysis with the variable under study. If we find a statistically significant effect of one or more of these interactional variables while controlling for other independent variables thought to predict pluralized forms of *haber* in Venezuelan Spanish, then the results will provide us with additional quantitative evidence of the importance of interactional factors in understanding the patterning of morpho-syntactic variables across multiple speech events. Building on previous analyses of Spanish *haber* pluralization, we code for 10 factors representing interactional, social, and linguistic variables: (1) interlocutor gender, (2) audience type, (3) length of turn, (4) speaker gender, (5) speaker occupation, (6) verbal form, (7) referent position, (8) determiner type, (9) polarity, and (10) mood. Additionally, we code for individual speaker to run as a random effect in our statistical model.

3.3.1 Interactional Variables

(1) *Interlocutor Gender*. Given the importance of speaker gender in predicting rates of pluralization in Venezuelan Spanish in previous studies (D'Aquino Ruiz, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 1999-2000), we have coded for the gender of the interlocutor in order to understand whether or not this might also be correlated with higher rates of pluralization. If agreement patterns with *haber* are indeed associated with female speakers, we might expect this variable to interact with other variables such as speaker gender and interlocutor type as speakers interactionally negotiate

stances and positionalities on *Aló Presidente*. This coding was dependent on the grammatically inflected forms used in the transcripts to refer to each speaker. While this task was accomplished mostly by observing the terms used to refer to the speaker's occupation (i.e. *ministro* 'minister_{MASC}' v. *ministra* 'minister_{FEM}'), it was at times also necessary to complete a careful analysis of conversational patterns in the discourse where adjectives referring to the speaker were marked grammatically as either masculine or feminine

(2) *Audience Type*. We include this factor as a variable because of the possibility that a shift in speech style may occur based on who is involved in a given interactional sequence on *Aló Presidente*. Upon a close analysis of the data, we noticed an important qualitative difference between when speakers interacted with each other on the show and when the general audience was being spoken to. Given this difference in interactions, we hypothesize that *haber* was used more in interactional sequences with responsive interlocutors and disfavored when the speaker was directly addressing the general audience.

(3) *Length of Turn*: Because of the perceived correlation between shorter turns and increased interaction on *Aló Presidente*, we include a measure of turn length in order to understand whether or not this factor might predict *haber* pluralization above and beyond the other interactional variables. We coded for this variable by executing a word count from the beginning to the end of each turn containing an *haber* token. We hypothesize that shorter, more engaged turns will predict pluralized forms.

(4) *Guest Frequency*. Studies of variable agreement with *haber* have often pointed to social class as an important predictor of pluralization in Venezuelan Spanish (Freites Barros, 2004; D'Aquino Ruiz, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 1999-2000; Bentivoglio & Sedano, 1989). Given the skewed distribution of speakers and their interactional patterns on *Aló Presidente*, however, our

ability to code for this factor was not possible. Upon taking a close look at the 71 guests represented within our data, we noticed an important difference between speakers who appeared regularly on *Aló Presidente* and those that did not. Regular guests, by the virtue of appearing multiple times on the show, were friendly with Chávez and tended to be among those in his political inner circle. Non-regular guests, on the other hand, were much more likely to be everyday Venezuelans removed from the power structures of the government. Thus, noting that guest frequency on the show captures speakers' access to power and social capital in a similar way to socio-economic status, we coded each token based on whether or not speakers were represented in our dataset across multiple episodes (regular) or a single episode (non-regular).

3.3.2 Social variables

(5) *Speaker Gender*. Following earlier studies that have found *haber* pluralization in Venezuelan Spanish to be strongly correlated with speaker gender (D'Aquino Ruiz, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 1999-2000), we code all tokens for this variable as either masculine or feminine. This coding was also accomplished by observing the grammatically inflected forms used in the transcripts to refer to each speaker.

2.2.3 Linguistic variables

(6) *Verbal Form*. D'Aquino Ruiz, in her quantitative analysis of *haber* regularization in Venezuelan Spanish, showed that compound forms (e.g. *deben haber* 'there have to be', *habían habido*, 'there had to have been') disfavor pluralization. An opposite result was described by Diaz-Campos (2003), however, using the same corpus of sociolinguistic interviews. Since agreement with compound forms is placed on an auxiliary verb and not directly on the *haber* form itself, it is possible that speakers interpret these two contexts differently. Given these conflicting prior results and its potential importance as a linguistic variable, we code verbal

forms into two variants: compound forms (perfect tenses, modal uses, periphrastic future) and simple forms (preterit, imperfect, synthetic future).

(7) *Referent Position*. In Spanish, grammatical subjects are discourse-old, topical referents while objects tend to be discourse-new, non-topical referents. Spanish is a subject-verb-object (SVO) language in which subjects, which always agree in number with the verb, almost always appear in preverbal position as a lexical or null argument. In *haber* constructions, which are used mostly to introduce discourse-new information, the referent is almost always a lexical noun phrase that appears after the verb in the prototypical focus position. While word order has not previously been found to predict rates of pluralization in Venezuelan Spanish, it has been an important predictor in other varieties (i.e. Castillo-Trelles, 2007). Moreover, topicality is an important predictor of direct object variation elsewhere in Spanish (e.g. Schwenter 2006). In order to determine whether or not preverbal and or null referents are more likely to be interpreted as subjects and therefore trigger agreement, we code for three variants: postverbal position (*había/n personas* ‘there is/were people’), preverbal position (*personas había/n* ‘people these is/were’), and other cases where the referent is non-lexical (*había/n* ‘there is/were Ø’).

(8) *Determiner Type*. Both Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) and D’Aquino Ruiz (2004) found that when Venezuelan speakers include a numeral (i.e. *dos, miles* ‘two,’ ‘thousands’) or indefinite quantifier (i.e. *algunos, muchos* ‘some’, ‘many’) in the clause with *haber*, there was an increased probability of pluralization. This may be because such quantifiers reinforce the notion of plurality as opposed to when nominal arguments appear simply with an adjective or as bare nouns. In order to see whether or not a similar effect on agreement patterns can be found in our data, we code each token for the presence of a numeral, presence of a definite determiner such as

a definite article, possessive or demonstrative pronoun, the presence of an indefinite quantifier, and the absence of a determiner.

(9) *Polarity*. We include this factor as a variable because, as Brown & Rivas (2012) point out, nominal arguments with negative scope in a clause are not referential and do not have a continuous identity over time. Thus, because distinguishing between singular and plural referents is not as important in constructions with negative polarity, we expect to find higher rates of agreement when the referent appears without negative adverbs or adjectives. In her 2004 study, D'Aquino Ruiz's also found affirmative polarity to be associated with higher rates of pluralization. Thus, we code all tokens for either affirmative or negative polarity.

(10) *Mood*. Like polarity, referents appearing in constructions in the subjunctive mood are not as referential as those appearing in the indicative mood. Previous studies on Venezuelan Spanish have found polarity to be an important predictor in distinguishing tense and aspect whereby present indicative conjugations rarely display agreement while present indicative conjugations do (D'Aquino Ruiz, 2004). We code our data for either indicative or subjunctive mood expressed within the *haber* clause.

(11) *Tense/Aspect/Mood of haber clause*. Nearly all studies of *haber* pluralization find that imperfect indicative constructions are the most likely to display plural marking while preterit forms are the least likely to do so. Additionally, Díaz-Campos (2003) finds that present perfect constructions, in addition to imperfect constructions, are associated with higher rates of pluralization. In order to see if our data pattern similarly, we code for each for the tense/aspect/mood of the clause: imperfect indicative, imperfect subjunctive, synthetic future, periphrastic future, preterit, and others.

(12) *Referent Animacy*. Finally, we coded each observation depending on whether or not the referent in the *haber* clause was human or non-human. Several prior studies of Venezuelan Spanish (Bentivoglio & Sedano 1989; Díaz-Campos 1999-2000; Domínguez et al. 1998) show that a human noun phrases favor *haber* pluralization, likely because human referents are more subject like than other non-human referents. To see whether or not our data behave similarly, we include this predictor as others have done by coding animacy in a binary way.

2.3 Data Analysis

In order to test our hypotheses and understand the effect of our independent variables in predicting *haber* pluralization on *Aló Presidente*, we run a fixed effects logistic regression model of the predictors using the `glm` command in R (R Core Team, 2012). Predictors were ordered following a stepwise procedure and models were compared using an ANOVA. The roles of the fixed and random effects were first tested on the entire data set and later on a subset of the data where all tokens produced by Chávez were removed. A different subset, which included only tokens produced by Chávez, was then submitted to a linear model. We outline these results in the section below.

3. Results

3.1 Statistical Modeling

Given the high rates of *haber* pluralization reported for Venezuelan Spanish in pervious studies (i.e. D'Aquino Ruiz, 2008; Freitas Barros, 2008), including for educated speech (DeMello, 1991), we were surprised to find a very low rate of agreement in our corpus. Overall frequencies of singular and plural variants are presented below in Table (1).

Table 1. Overall *haber* variant frequencies

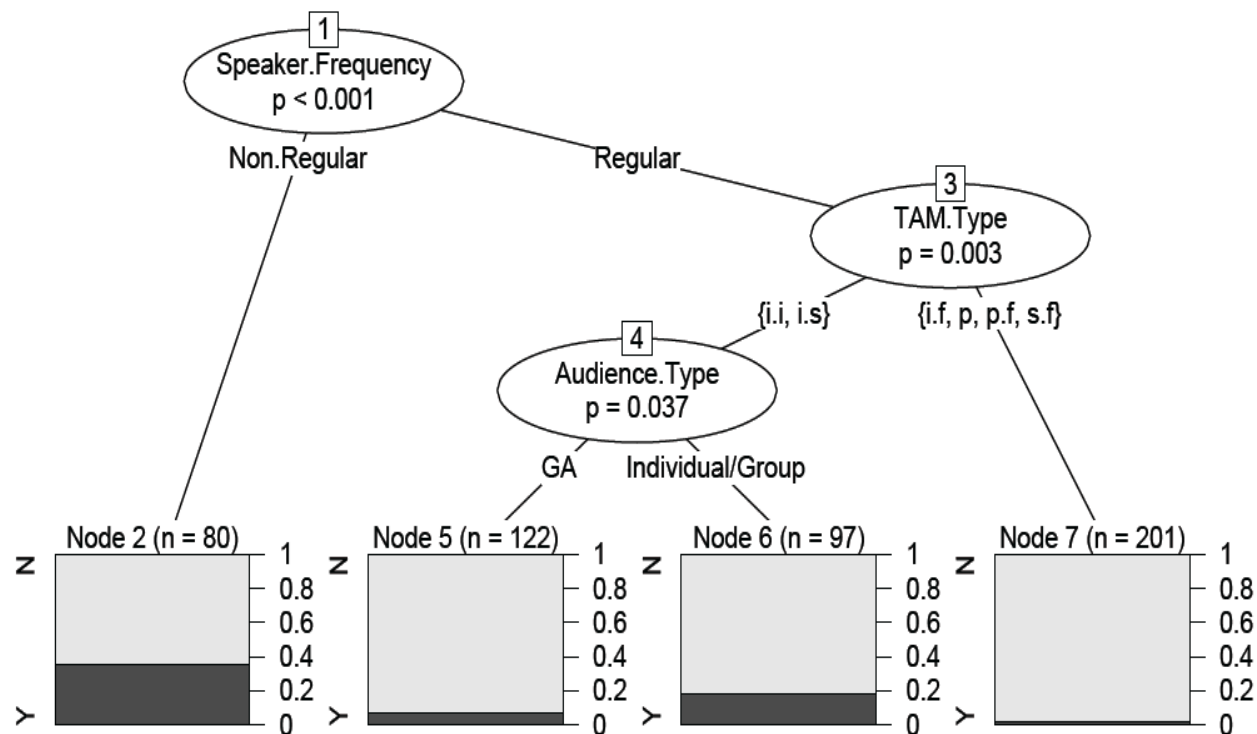
	Singular	Pluralized
Total	442 (88.4%)	58 (11.6%)

The best fitting model shows that guest frequency, referent position in the clause, tense/aspect/mood, determiner type, and audience type are the best predictors of *haber* pluralization on *Aló Presidente* among those considered. As illustrated in Table (2), the odds of tokens spoken by non-regular guests using pluralized forms of *haber* are pointedly higher than the odds for the overall group ($p < 0.001$). The odds of pluralization are also higher for clauses with null referents ($p < .05$) and indefinite quantifiers ($p < .01$), but lower for preterit constructions ($p < .05$). Furthermore, the effect of audience type indicates that talk directed at a group or individuals predicts higher rates of agreement ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Best logistic regression model for all speakers in data set, sum contrasts

N = 500	Estimate	SE	zValue	p-value
(Intercept)	-1.78	.484	-3.68	<.001
Guest Frequency				
<i>Non Regulars</i>	.883	.183	4.82	<.001
Referent Position in Clause				
<i>Null</i>	1.02	.418	2.45	<.05
Preverbal	-.476	.398	-1.20	<i>ns</i>
Postverbal	-.548	.719	-0.85	<i>ns</i>
Tense/Aspect/Mood Type				
Periphrastic Future	1.07	.817	1.31	<i>ns</i>
Imperfect Indicative	.470	.336	1.40	<i>ns</i>
Imperfect Subjunctive	.334	.961	.348	<i>ns</i>
Others	.036	.514	.070	<i>ns</i>
Synthetic Future	-.433	.378	-1.35	<i>ns</i>
<i>Preterit</i>	-1.48	.614	-2.41	<.05
Quantifier Type				
<i>Indefinite</i>	.982	.308	3.06	<.01
Numeral	-.008	.381	-0.24	<i>ns</i>
None	-.273	.295	-1.02	<i>ns</i>
Definite	-.630	.609	-.906	<i>ns</i>
Audience Type				
<i>Group/Individual</i>	.383	.189	-2.03	<.05

Figure 1. Conditional inference tree displaying interactions in dataset



In order to further understand how the variables in Table 2 are related and interact with each other, we submitted them to additional analysis by creating a conditional inference tree. As explained in Tagliamonte (2011), conditional inference trees assess whether an independent variable is a useful predictor of the dependent variable, and then subdivide and further evaluate each predictor based on factor levels to consider the effects of interactions. In Figure 1, the inference tree first considers whether splitting the data for regular guests into multiple TAM type groups corresponds with higher rates of pluralization. The results indicate that non-regular guests are much more likely to produce pluralized variants than regular guests ($p < .001$), though regular guests do so most often when using imperfect constructions ($p < .01$). Subsequently, the importance of the variable representing audience type was considered with the result that regular

guests, when using imperfect constructions, pluralize the most when speaking to responsive interlocutors.

At this point, the data were further divided in order to observe whether the results obtained in our best fitting model were independent of the interactional patterns of Chávez since the majority of the tokens in our data set were uttered by him. As summarized in Table 3, the best fitting model for *Aló Presidente* guests shows speaker gender to be the strongest predictor of *haber* pluralization in addition to null referents. Here, an important difference emerged in that, without the Chávez tokens, speech directed at the general audience was no longer found to robustly predict low rates of pluralization. These results are summarized in Table 3 and briefly discussed below in Section 4.

Table 3. Best model excluding Chavez, sum contrasts

N=99	Estimate	SE	zValue	p-value
(Intercept)	-0.639	.508	1.26	.209
Speaker Gender				
<i>Female</i>	1.20	.543	2.22	<.05
Referent Position in Clause				
<i>Null</i>	.661	.281	2.35	<.05

Lastly, we completed fixed effect modeling that considered only the tokens produced by Chávez. The best fitting model includes as significant predictors quantifier type, referent position in the clause, and audience type. Once again, we find null referents to be an important predictor of plural forms. Unlike the model in Table 3, however, talk directed at responsive interlocutors and clauses with an indefinite quantifier prove to be reliable predictors of pluralization. This model is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Model only including Chavez, sum contrasts

N = 401	Estimate	SE	zValue	p-value
(Intercept)	-2.14	.388	-5.53	<.001
Quantifier Type				
<i>Indefinite</i>	.740	.233	3.09	<.01
Audience Type				
<i>Individual Group</i>	.494	.462	2.24	<.05
Referent Position in Clause				
<i>Null</i>	.574	.268	2.41	<.05

3.2 Looking Beyond the Models

While our models point to many important factors predicting speakers' uses of non-standard agreement with *haber*, they still fail to provide a more complete picture of the interactions and distribution of *haber* forms on the show. A few important points will be mentioned here. First, nearly all interactions on the show are between Chávez and the cameras. This is because he was the nexus of nearly all interaction on *Aló Presidente*. Few guests ever addressed the general audience or anyone other than Chávez. Upon digging into the numbers, we also find that *haber* agreement emerged primarily during interpersonal dialogues between show regulars and non-regular guests; no examples occur during interactions between Chávez and regular guests. Moreover, non-standard, pluralized variants of *haber* are not symbolic of the colorful speech styles of the show's host, former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. While he does use them when speaking to the general audience, he uses them most when speaking to supporters that are making a one-time appearance on the show. Finally, *Aló Presidente* was a male dominated space. No female speakers were regular guests on the show and women represent a small fraction of the overall observations. Nevertheless, women were more likely than not to produce a pluralized variant of *haber*.

4. Discussion

The importance of previously unconsidered interactional factors in predicting variable agreement patterns in *haber* constructions is shown by the result obtained for the effect of guest frequency and audience type. These predictors help us address the question of to whom and with whom these stigmatized plural variants are being used. We find that rates of pluralization on *Aló Presidente* differed as a function of whether or not a speaker regularly appeared on the show and also regularly used *haber* clauses. For Chávez, talk directed at a responsive interlocutor was an important predictor of use of stigmatized plural variants while talk directed at the general audience was not. This indicates that audience design was likely an important factor contributing to Chávez's use of this variable while for other speakers this was not the case. Furthermore, clauses with null referents are strongly predictive of non-standard agreement while clauses with lexical arguments are not. Since null arguments necessarily must span multiple clauses in order to be interpreted at their moment of occurrence, this points to an effect of topicality on agreement. Such a result is in line with prior studies that have found topicality to be an important predictor of other variable direct object phenomena in Spanish like clitic doubling, null objects, and differential object marking (Landa 1995; Dumitrescu (1997:332); Estigarribia 2003; Schwenter 2006).

Taken together, the results of our study help us to begin to understand how plural variants of *haber* emerge during interactions between guests on *Aló, Presidente*. Some of the previous factors predicting agreement in Venezuelan Spanish, like tense/aspect/mood of the clause and quantifier type, are important predictors here as well. Others, like polarity, mood, and animacy, are not. Moreover, we find a very low rate of agreement in this dataset compared to prior studies in Venezuela. We interpret this result as pointing to the continued stigmatization of this variable

given the high-stakes and formal nature of the interactions that took place on *Aló Presidente*. While additional observations will need to be analyzed before definitive conclusions can be established, these data allow us to begin to understand how this particular example of morpho-syntactic variation is implicated in the power relations of the show and specifically who gets to introduce new topics.

Indeed, our data point to an inherent link between topicality, guest frequency, and audience type that was unexpected given our initial hypotheses. Topicality, the most consistent predictor in the three models, relates to the possibility of a referent spanning multiple clauses. This ability to talk about topics across time, however, was unevenly allocated to speakers on the *Aló Presidente*. The speakers that were the most likely to use stigmatized plural variants were the same speakers that Chávez provided the most room to ask questions, share problems, and bring up new topics on the show. Speakers producing tokens of *haber* spanning multiple episodes within our dataset were not only much less likely to produce plural variants but also much less likely to talk at length on the show. Additionally, while stigmatized variants emerge primarily during interpersonal dialogue between Chávez and his guests, this is restricted to non-regular guests only. Not a single plural token occurs during interactions between Chávez and regular guests. Guests were rarely allowed to address the general audience or each other and this helps explain the uneven distribution of variants among speakers and across interactions.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to describe possible correlations between interactional variables and speakers' uses of a stigmatized morphosyntactic variable on Hugo Chávez's talk show *Aló Presidente*. A speaker's relationship with Chávez was found to be the best predictor of

haber pluralization in our statistical modeling and this points to a complex interaction between a speaker's ability to sustain a discourse topic over time and the type of audience that the speech containing the variable is directed to. At a fundamental level, these findings complicate traditional notions of grammar as a neutral object, possessed by individuals, and constrained by social and linguistic factors. While additional observations will help us understand whether or not Chávez's increased use of plural variants during interpersonal dialogue with non-regular guests represents attempts at establishing empathy with his constituents, interactions on *Aló Presidente* illustrate how social relations both constrain and enable the emergence of language. This makes grammar political to its very core. To comprehend the nature of linguistic variation, we must continue to look beyond the traditional methods and tools of variationist sociolinguistics that seek to hold power relations constant and under-theorize the non-neutrality of language-in-use.

5. References

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